

U.S. Citizen Security Message
U.S. Embassy, Kuala Lumpur
July 7, 2015

Following the May 14, 2015 kidnapping of two Malaysian nationals from a restaurant outside the city of Sandakan, the U.S. Embassy reminds U.S. citizens to review important security information regarding travel in the eastern coastal region of the Malaysian state of Sabah. The targeted areas are detailed in our most recent Malaysia Specific Information-Threats to Safety and Security. The full text is included in this message.

THREATS TO SAFETY AND SECURITY: The Department of State remains concerned about the possibility of terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens in Southeast Asia. Extremist groups in the region have demonstrated the capability to carry out attacks in locations where Westerners congregate, and these groups do not distinguish between civilian and official targets. The U.S. government has designated two such groups, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. JI is linked to al-Qaeda and other regional terrorist groups and has cells operating throughout the region. Since May 2015, Malaysian authorities have arrested over 100 supporters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist group, including many individuals who planned to fight in Syria and Iraq.

U.S. citizens should consider the risks associated with travel to coastal eastern Sabah (Eastern Malaysia) because of the threat of kidnappings-for-ransom and violence from both terrorist and criminal groups. U.S. government employees are prohibited from travelling to most of this area without prior permission from the Embassy security office and Ambassador. The requirement for U.S. government employees to receive permission before traveling to these areas indicates a strong concern over safety, given recent kidnappings of foreign tourists in the region. Accordingly, U.S. citizens are advised against travel to coastal areas and outlying islands in Eastern Sabah from Kudat to Tawau.

The Malaysian government has designated the entire eastern portion of Sabah (extending from the town of Kudat in the north to Tawau district near the border of Indonesia) as the Eastern Sabah Security Zone, and established the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) to coordinate security forces' activity. There is a significant police and army presence in the area, and road checkpoints have

increased. The Malaysian government has also enhanced efforts to patrol its maritime border with the Philippines, yet the area's size and remoteness continue to make the region vulnerable to future security incidents.

Malaysian law enforcement officials have enacted land and water-based curfews in the coastal areas of Eastern Sabah. Curfew schedules and the affected areas are subject to frequent change; upon arrival to the Eastern Sabah region, travelers should check local media or ask local police for the most recent curfew information.

Recent incidents: In May 2015, two Malaysian nationals were kidnapped from a restaurant six miles from the city of Sandakan. In July 2014, at a diving resort on Mabul Island, armed men killed a Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) officer and kidnapped another officer. In June 2014, a Philippine and a Malaysian national were kidnapped from a fish farm in Kunak, 37 miles from Lahad Datu. In April 2014, a foreign tourist and a hotel employee were kidnapped by armed men from a water village-style resort a short distance off the coast near Semporna. In November 2013, a foreign tourist was killed and his spouse was abducted from a resort on Pom Pom Island. In August 2013, Malaysian officials reported an aborted attempt by an armed Filipino group to kidnap foreign tourists from the resort island of Mabul. In addition to incursions on coastal or island resort islands themselves, criminal or terrorist groups may attempt to intercept boats ferrying tourists from the mainland to resort islands. In February 2013, armed intruders from the Sulu archipelago, who entered the area by sea from the southern Philippines, were involved in a violent confrontation with Malaysian security forces in Lahad Datu district and in the Seminul water village, located in Semporna.

The U.S. Embassy is not aware of specific threats to U.S. citizens in Malaysia at this time.

We strongly recommend that U.S. citizens traveling to or residing in Malaysia enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at <http://www.travel.state.gov/>. STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates, and makes it easier for the embassy or nearest consulate to contact you in an emergency. If you don't have Internet access, enroll directly with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Regularly monitor the Department's website, where you can find current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and the Worldwide Caution. Read the Country Specific

Information for Malaysia. For additional information, refer to “A Safe Trip Abroad.”

Contact the embassy or consulate for up-to-date information on travel restrictions. You can also call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). Follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

The U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur is located at 376 Jalan Tun Razak 50400, Kuala Lumpur and is open 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. If you are a U.S. citizen and have any questions or concerns, please call the U.S. Embassy at (03) 2168-5000 or visit the U.S. Citizens Service website at <http://malaysia.usembassy.gov/>. We will post the most updated information on the website.